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Green Churches

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You've heard about the Power and the Glory. But Episcopal Power & Light?!

Created a year ago, EP&L is encouraging Episcopal churches near San Francisco to buy renewable electricity. GreenMountain gives a $250 donation or a free energy audit to every church signing up with the company. Each family of participating parishioners earns the church an additional $35.

Even with those incentives, the program has recruited only 16 of its 87 target congregations. Still, that 18 percent response rate is better than the 2 percent choice rate for California residents in general. Results may improve under an aggregation agreement EP&L helped negotiate with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. It gives 150 Episcopal churches the large-customer discount on "green" power.

On the opposite coast, the Pennsylvania Council of Churches is distributing "Global Warming & Electric Restructuring in Pennsylvania: a Temptation or an Opportunity?" The brochure asks people of faith, as a matter of "religious responsibility," to buy green power to help prevent global warming.

Choice and Cost

Not all religious organizations are using choice to "go green." Cost is a major issue for donation-dependent groups at which every dollar spent on electricity is unavailable for food for the homeless or a vital roof repair.

Cost is clearly on the mind of Bob Kortenhaus, who's getting competitive price quotes for the religious school where he's on the board as well as for his home and business. "Here you've got a

Catholic school that is always looking to cut costs," he told the Newark, New Jersey, Star-Ledger. "I'll be a big hero if I can get them some additional savings."

Then there's the Rev. Franklin Vilas in Chatham, New Jersey. Using attention-getting statements like "Buy cheap energy and kill your kids," he's leading an multi-church/temple aggregation effort to get better prices on cleaner power.

Quakers

Faith-based energy choice is not a new phenomenon. In "Towards a Quaker Approach to Energy" (http://www.quaker.org/fep/), Karen Street and Peter Trier of the Berkeley Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends make energy choice a matter of conscience:

Our testimonies tell us to take away the occasions that lead to war: energy and water are expected to be the two main causes of war in the immediate future. Our testimonies speak of equality: oil production will peak in the next 10 to 15 years while 4.5 [percent] of the world's population uses about 25 [percent] of the world's oil... Our testimony says that we will not fight with outward weapons, yet our lifestyle itself is killing large numbers. Street and Trier acknowledge at the outset that "Energy choices are complicated. They involve technical data that most of us don't have."

And they refuse to render knee-jerk reactions to parts of the industry some environmental groups dismiss. "Two hundred people may die over the next 10,000 years as a result of nuclear waste generated this year from 100 reactors," they point out, "while 2,000 coal miners will die this year."

Most provocative is Street's and Trier's refusal to put energy choices into platitudes for which everyone can cheer-lead without actually having to do anything. "How many therms of natural gas and kWh do I use per day?" they force us to ask ourselves. "Do I take best advantage of passive or natural heating and cooling options (window shades, passive solar heat, etc.) for my home before turning to energy-consuming methods? Do I use energy, when possible, at off-peak hours? Do I avoid the use of packaged drinks, and avoid the use of aluminum foil when a less energy costly alternative is available? Do I take short showers? Do I share tools and cars with the neighbors, or rent them? Do I avoid buying products from far away when there are local sources available?"

They also ask, "Do I support raising the price of energy to the actual cost of energy?" Think you do? Six years ago, did you ask your members of Congress to vote for a BTU gasoline tax of one-half cent per gallon? Did I?

THE END.